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Published November 19, 2006

Holland case experts cost Ingham Co. at least \$18K

Prosecutors, defense agree witness fees worthwhile

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

Ingham County likely will pay at least \$18,000 to expert witnesses involved in Lisa Holland's trial, according to court records and attorneys involved in the case.

But both prosecutors and defense attorneys say the costs were justified.

The 33-year-old Williamston woman was convicted last month of first-degree felony murder and first-degree child abuse in the death of her 7-year-old adopted son, Ricky.

Experts who reviewed the case and/or testified for the prosecution have already billed the county nearly \$11,000, court records show. That figure will increase because bills for a few prosecution witnesses have not yet been submitted. A judge must approve expert witness fees.

Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunning III said his office made every effort to keep costs down. But, he said, "It was money well spent."

He said the county likely saved thousands of dollars because Sparrow Health System provided a world-class expert at an extremely reduced rate.

Sparrow billed the county \$1,800 for the services of forensic pathologist Dr. Joyce deJong, who did extensive work on the case.

"Her bill could have easily been 10 times what it was," Dunning said. "It's a contribution Sparrow makes to the community."

The expert who cost the most by far was Dr. Elaine Pomeranz, a University of Michigan child abuse expert. The county will pay her \$7,100.

Pomeranz was supposed to testify she diagnosed a psychiatric condition that would explain why Lisa Holland exaggerated or lied about Ricky's health problems, according to testimony at a special hearing the jury did not see.

Co-counsel sued for photocopy costs

The Ingham County Sheriff's Office has filed a lawsuit against Lisa Holland's co-counsel Andrew Abood seeking about \$7,600 - mostly for photocopies and the time spent to make them.

The lawsuit, filed Oct. 24 in East Lansing's 54B District Court, claims Abood's law firm has "failed, refused and neglected to pay" for copies, compact discs, DVDs and employee time to prepare the items.

The sheriff's office made 4,677 copies - almost all billed at \$1 per page, according to the lawsuit. The sheriff's office also charged \$2,387 for the 67 hours that detectives spent making the copies.

Abood said he requested the materials from the prosecutor's office, which has a legal obligation to provide them. They don't charge for copying costs, he said.

The lawsuit also asks for costs and attorney fees, as well as interest.

But defense attorneys objected to Pomeranz testifying, saying she reviewed documents that had not been introduced as evidence.

Prosecutors eventually relented, and Pomeranz testified only generally about Lisa Holland's pattern of reporting symptoms in Ricky that doctors, school officials and others were not seeing.

Ingham County Circuit Judge Paula Manderfield said she questioned prosecutors about how much Pomeranz charged to review the case.

Manderfield said prosecutors told her Pomeranz, who may have reviewed thousands of pages of documents, agreed to testify at a reduced rate - \$200 an hour, instead of her usual \$300 per hour.

Lisa Holland's defense team will bill the county about \$8,000 for its experts, her co-counsel Mike Nichols said.

In August, Manderfield ruled that the county would pay up to about \$15,000 for defense experts in the case.

Defense attorneys for both Lisa and Tim Holland requested financial assistance, saying their clients could not afford the experts. At the time, Tim Holland was a co-defendant. He later pleaded guilty to second-degree murder.

Nichols said it was a worthwhile expense: "That way, the community can be assured every effort was made to scrutinize the prosecution's evidence, as well as evidence that was favorable to Lisa Holland."

Dunnings said he or other county officials will dispute costs for defense experts. He said it's possible some of those charges were made before Manderfield ruled the Hollands were indigent. If that is so, he said, the county should not be responsible.

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.

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ROCHELLE RILEY: Tears mix with justice

BY ROCHELLE RILEY

FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

November 19, 2006

The judge almost cried. And that finally did it for me.

I'd been reading news accounts for months about the slow torture and death of 7-year-old Ricky Holland, articles written by my colleague Jack Kresnak, who has reported on the plight of children and saved more than few lives in his career.

The case made me angry. But I finally cried after reading that Judge Paula Manderfield stifled a sob as she sentenced Ricky's father, Tim Holland, to 30-60 years in prison. It was he who helped his wife wrap Ricky's battered body in garbage bags and dump him into a swamp.

The Holland case broke hearts across the state, creating a palpable sadness. Judges aren't immune.

"A judge can't cry," Manderfield said. "But it was a very emotionally draining case; it was for everyone. During closing arguments, everyone was getting choked up. I saw jurors wiping away tears. Everyone was just getting emotional about it. And during closing, I looked at one of the detectives -- he's been around for 20-plus years -- and he had tears running down both cheeks."

A case like no other

It has been 14 years since Manderfield was elected to the Lansing District Court and six since she was elected to the Ingham Circuit Court. She has seen plenty of cases, but none like the Holland case.

"This was the worst case for me," she said. "You couldn't be a human being without having some kind of emotional reaction to this case. My twins are his age. They're 7 and a half."

And then Manderfield, a former attorney, did cry.

A few seconds later, she declined to discuss the case itself, because Lisa Holland still faces sentencing on her murder conviction. Manderfield said she held her tears in court so as not to influence the case.

But when she was back in her chambers or in the car, driving to day care -- she let down her guard.

"I thought about Ricky when I went home with my kids," she said.

United in grief

No one who listened each day in the courtroom to the horror of that little boy's life remained unscathed. Even the jurors united in grief, continuing to see each other after the trial ended.

"It was traumatic for the jurors," Manderfield said. "This jury really bonded together like no one I've ever seen. They've gotten together after the trial, got together for a cookout."

The judge's staff was affected as well.

"My court reporter was working on the transcript of the case at night at home," the judge said. "She was having nightmares."

When she begins her new term in January, Manderfield, 53, will be prepared. Someone else will kill. Someone else will do something monstrous.

She'll be waiting. And she will be prepared.

But, she said that after the Holland case, "I don't think we'll ever be the same. We were all changed in some way."

ROCHELLE RILEY'S columns appear Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays. Read her columns online at www.freep.com/rochelleriley. Catch her on "Am I Right?" at 8:30 p.m. Fridays on Detroit Public Television (TV-56). Contact her at rriley99@freepress.com or 313-223-4473.

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Trial set to start Monday in baby girl's death

Saturday, November 18, 2006

By Scott Hagen

shagen@citpat.com -- 768-4929

A jury trial is scheduled to start Monday to determine whether a Jackson man was responsible for the April death of a month-old baby girl.

David Monroe, 26, is charged with felony murder, second-degree murder and first-degree child abuse in a case where authorities allege the baby was shaken to death.

Monroe had been living for about nine months with his girlfriend, Tomi Romer, in her third-floor apartment on Porter Street.

He served as a surrogate father for Jaylan and Romer's other daughter, 4-year-old Haley.

Romer testified during a preliminary examination that she was asleep on the couch at 1:30 a.m., April 26 when Monroe woke her up and said Jaylan was struggling to breathe.

The couple took Jaylan to Foote Hospital. The baby, diagnosed with severe head trauma and brain bleeding, was flown by helicopter to University of Michigan Hospital in critical condition.

Hope that the baby would recover soon vanished. Jaylan was pronounced dead three days later and removed from life support.

Police immediately suspected shaken-baby syndrome. Interviews of the couple cleared Romer. Monroe later broke down during questioning and confessed to shaking Jaylan when she wouldn't stop crying.

A letter that Monroe wrote to Romer, apologizing for the shaking, is scheduled to be submitted as evidence at trial.

During the trial, a jury will hear from a forensic pathologist, doctors from Foote Hospital and the University of Michigan Hospital, and officers who questioned Monroe.

At one point it appeared unlikely that a trial would go forth at all. Monroe and his defense attorney, Jerry Engle, waived the preliminary examination.

The prosecutor's office was prepared to drop the felony murder charge -- and the possible life sentence that accompanies it -- in exchange for a guilty plea to the other two charges.

Monroe backed out at the last minute, forcing Romer to testify and, as she said at the time, relive the nightmare experience that left her newborn dead.

Monroe has remained in the county jail without bond since his arrest.

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Article published Nov 17, 2006

BREAKING NEWS

Moussaed found guilty

Sonya Moussaed was found guilty of first degree murder today about three hours after the jury began deliberations.

Ms. Moussaed, 28, had been charged with open murder in relation to 17-month old Gracie Simmons' death April 20. The jurors convened this morning at 8:30 a.m. to begin their process of finding a verdict and came back to the court around 11:30 a.m. to read their decision before the judge and defendant.

Ms. Moussaed did not appear to react when the verdict was called. Those watching in the audience, however, let out gasps and both those in support of the defense and the prosecution began crying.

The decision of the jury wraps up the trial that began on Monday.

During Thursday's proceedings the defense called their key witness, Dr. Werner Spitz, a prominent forensic pathologist, to testify. Dr. Spitz declared the injuries that lead to Gracie's death were from a fall down the stairs. On Tuesday, the prosecution rested its case by calling its final witness, a child abuse expert who testified that Gracie could have suffered the various and severe injuries only by being brutally beaten to death.

In the closing arguments Thursday, Monroe County Assistant Prosecutor Allison Arnold connected the dots for the jurors, tying links between Ms. Moussaed's behavior, her inconsistent statements following the incident, testimony from friends and family of Ms. Moussaed and the testimony of the experts.

Co-counsel for the defense Ronnie Wingate contended it was all a matter of perspective in his closing remarks. He said Ms. Moussaed may have acted out of fear following Gracie's death, and may have been guilty of lying as a result, but that did not make her a murderer. He also said the prosecution was basing its case on the testimony of one expert witness, which left room for reasonable doubt.

The case was heard before Monroe County Circuit Judge Joseph A. Costello Jr. Sentencing has been set for 10 a.m. Wednesday, Dec. 20. Ms. Moussaed will be facing life in prison.

For more on this story, see Saturday's Evening News.

Family plea: Don't forget Raven Jeffries' slaying

Web site seeks tips as probe drags on

BY JACK KRESNAK
 FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

November 20, 2006

Three months after her slaying, there is scant news about who abducted 7-year-old Raven Jeffries from her Detroit neighborhood, killed her and burned her body in a Romulus field.

But her family is not giving up hope that some day they will know exactly what happened to Raven, who did it and why.

"I'm not about to let the memory of my little girl die," said Raven's mother, Brenda Jeffries, 41.

So the Jeffries family, with help from Homestead.com, has set up a Web site as a memorial to Raven with hope that it will prompt someone to come forth with information to help Romulus police solve the case.

"What I want to know is what happened and why did it happen," Jeffries said last week after the family erected a Christmas memorial to Raven near her home on McDonald Street in southwest Detroit.

The Web site -- www.ravenmariejeffries.com -- includes pictures of her; music, such as a snippet of Van Morrison's "Brown Eyed Girl," and a description of her family, especially her sisters Ashley and Sherry and brothers Timmy and David.

Romulus police, assisted by Detroit police investigators, have questioned more than 30 people in the search for a suspect. Romulus detectives working the case were not available for comment last week.

But Joyce Clay, secretary to Romulus Public Safety Director Charles Kirby, said: "There is nothing new at this time."

Brenda Jeffries, who said she thinks she knows the primary suspect in her daughter's death, said she is frustrated by the seeming lack of progress. Raven was abducted in early August and found dead more than a week later.

Jeffries said she is planning a celebration for Raven's birthday on Jan. 8 that would include students and faculty at Chadsey High School.

"I want to make a big ceremony for her on that day," Jeffries said.

Anyone who may have information about Raven Jeffries' abduction or death should call Romulus police at 734-941-8400 anytime.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.



Brenda Jeffries, right, Raven's mom, is planning a celebration for Raven's birthday on Jan. 8. She's consoled by friend Wanda DeJesus in August after Raven was abducted and before she was found dead. (MANDI WRIGHT/Detroit Free Press)

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DETROIT FREE PRESS LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Birth parents failed, too

The foster care system failed Isaac Lethbridge. But it sickens me to hear his birth father saying, "We're just happy that slowly, justice is being done," because had his birth parents been responsible enough to handle their own child, he may not have died ("Mother loses her rights as a parent," Nov. 14). Isaac's parents should blame themselves.

Detective seeks more interviews

New evidence sought in teacher's sex case

BY JOHN WISELY and L.L. BRASIER

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

November 18, 2006

As a judge weighs whether to overturn the child sex-assault convictions of an Oak Park kindergarten teacher, police have begun to conduct new interviews with school staffers.

These witnesses include at least one Key Elementary School staffer who told the Free Press after James Perry's conviction that the assaults could not have happened as prosecutors argued in court.

Perry, 32, was convicted by an Oakland County Circuit Court jury in September of forcing two boys -- then ages 4 and 5 -- to perform sex acts on him in an empty special-education classroom last year. His attorneys have asked the judge to retry the case or dismiss the criminal charges, arguing the attacks could not have happened in that room, and that the trial was tainted by prejudicial remarks.

Judge Denise Langford Morris, who has postponed Perry's sentencing, is not expected to rule on the defense request until at least December.

Oak Park Public Safety Director John McNeilance acknowledged this week that Detective Erik Dolan has been interviewing staffers in the school district, including people he had not interviewed before trial.

"The case is up for appeal, and we've been asked to look into some things," McNeilance said of the interviews. He wouldn't disclose who requested the additional investigative work, but he did say the department received phone calls after the trial and after a Nov. 1 Free Press article raised questions about whether the attacks happened. McNeilance said the new information doesn't point to additional accusers or any new charges against Perry, who remains in jail.

"It's involving the same case," McNeilance said. "I wouldn't say it's out of the ordinary, but it isn't something we do on every case."

Oakland County prosecutors, who have said they remain convinced of Perry's guilt and satisfied by the jury's unanimous verdict, have recently declined interviews with the Free Press.

But in an e-mail to the Free Press, Oakland County's Chief Deputy Prosecutor Deborah Carley wrote that Dolan is "interviewing for potential new evidence and a lead that will not be beneficial to your cause." She added that the information Dolan is pursuing, which she declined to identify, "is not information that he knew or could have known about at an earlier date."

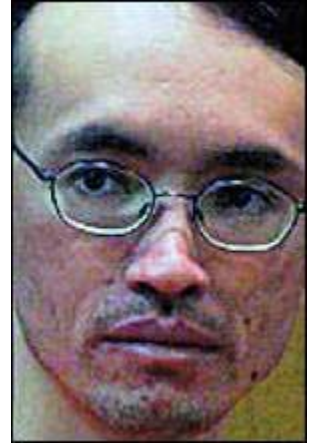
Defense lawyer Raymond Correll saw the new police interviews differently, saying, "Their case has collapsed, and now they are looking for a way to resurrect it. You can't bolster evidence that isn't there."

An Oakland County jury convicted Perry of attacking the two boys on Oct. 12, 2005. The case was based almost entirely on the boys' accounts, accounts that shifted significantly in the 11 months before trial. One of the boys testified that Perry snatched them from a school hallway, where they were in line with another teacher waiting for lunch. The boy said Perry took them into the empty special-ed classroom and forced them to perform oral sex.

During the initial investigation, Dolan never interviewed the three adults assigned to the room that day. Those staffers told the Free Press that room was occupied throughout the school day, making it impossible for the assaults to have occurred there.

On Thursday, Dolan sought to interview Clara Geary, the special-ed teacher assigned to the room. She testified as a defense witness at trial that the room was always occupied with children and adults. Geary declined to meet with Dolan.

Dolan also recently interviewed school lunchroom aides.



Oak Park kindergarten teacher James Perry's attorneys asked a judge to dismiss charges or retry his child sex-assault case.

Ron Payok, the retired principal at Lessenger Elementary, where Perry worked previously, said a former colleague at Lessenger said Dolan had contacted her.

It is unclear, however, if the detective has sought to interview the two special-ed aides who worked with Geary.

At a Nov. 1 court hearing, the judge agreed to review sworn statements submitted by the two special-ed aides, who stated their room was always occupied. Those aides never testified at trial but were quoted in the Free Press article.

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BRIAN DICKERSON: Prosecutor's only duty in sex case is to justice

BY BRIAN DICKERSON
FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

November 20, 2006

There's good news and bad news for James Perry, the Oak Park kindergarten teacher facing life in prison for two sexual assaults he insists never happened.

Perry, 32, was convicted Sept. 20 after two kindergartners testified that he accosted them in an empty classroom at Key Elementary School.

But Oakland County Circuit Judge Denise Langford Morris postponed his sentencing earlier this month after Perry's attorneys argued that testimony by newly discovered witnesses proves the crime described by his accusers could not have taken place.

Langford Morris says she wants more time to review the transcript of Perry's trial and affidavits provided by two school employees whose testimony Perry's jury never heard.

Fresh eyes needed

The good news for Perry is that police and prosecutors have begun interviewing witnesses overlooked in their original investigation.

The bad news is that the guy leading the expanded investigation is the same Oak Park detective whose sloppy police work raised so many questions about the original verdict, and that Oakland County Prosecutor Dave Gorcyca seems more interested in protecting his office's reputation than in scrutinizing new evidence with an open mind.

The gist of Perry's claim is that the classroom in which police and prosecutors maintain he molested his victims during the middle of a busy school day was occupied all day by students and adults, none of whom recall seeing Perry or the boys.

Perry's attorneys argue that eyewitness testimony refuting the prosecution's version of events, combined with the striking absence of evidence to substantiate the children's ever-evolving accusations, is sufficient to warrant a new trial.

But what is most unsettling is the state's response. Assistant Oakland County Prosecutor Andrea Dean doesn't dispute the new eyewitness accounts, and she seems unconcerned that they cannot be reconciled with the scenario she described to jurors.

Instead, Dean makes the astonishing argument that the state has no obligation to prove that the assaults took place in the time and place asserted during Perry's trial, but has only

to establish that he assaulted the kindergartners sometime or other, somewhere in Oakland County.

More than a technicality

It's not clear prosecutors can still meet even that heavily discounted burden of proof. But surely time and place are more than technical details with which Perry's accusers need not be concerned.

Ultimately, Gorcyca's obligation is not to defend Perry's conviction at any cost, but to assure that justice prevails.

If new evidence raises serious doubts about Perry's culpability, as many people familiar with his case believe, Gorcyca should rejoice in its discovery, and his office should take the lead in surfacing anything else that points to a miscarriage of justice.

Anything less is a betrayal not just of James Perry, but also of the public Gorcyca serves and the principles every officer of the court is sworn to uphold.

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Roof Sit aims to raise \$15,000 for children

By LIZ SHEPARD Argus-Press Staff Writer

Saturday, November 18, 2006 9:03 AM EST

Holding onto the edge of the Versa Handler Bobcat's basket with one hand and his microphone with the other hand, Dan "the man" Stewart ascended to the top of the Owosso McDonald's with a large fur hat and no plans of returning to the ground anytime soon.

"I hope it starts snowing so I can sing Christmas carols," Stewart said wearing multiple layers to protect himself from the cold winds as he spent his first morning on the elevated, make-shift studio.

With a newly added set of wooden stairs to meet him on the restaurant's roof, Stewart started broadcasting for Z 92.5 The Castle at about 7 a.m. as part of the Shiawassee County Child Advocacy Center's third annual Coins for Kids Roof Sit.

Stewart said he will not come down from the roof until he raises \$15,000. The money will help pay the mortgage on the Child Advocacy Center building located at 1216 W. Main St. in Owosso. Funding for the center comes from grants so payment for the building's mortgage must be raised.

For the past two years, Stewart has spent an entire weekend on the roof starting on a Friday morning and leaving it at the earliest Sunday afternoon.

"The wind is what really gets you up here," he said, adding that they have lost two tents in the past two years.

While shouting back to the cars who honked as they drove by on M-21 and telling d.j.'s in the radio station he would make weather reports because he is Dan the Man 2000 instead of using a doppler 2000, Stewart enjoyed the start of the third annual Coins for Kids Roof Sit, but knows the fundraiser is for a very serious cause.

"I was abused when I was a child," Stewart said, explaining what made him want to stay on the McDonald's roof until the money is raised. "And I'm also an elementary school teacher. I just like little kids - they're just so cute and cuddly."

Volunteers held Coins for Kids buckets at ground level asking drive-through customers for donations where they will remain until the goal is met. Volunteers will also be at McDonald's in Corunna, Durand and Perry at peak hours.

"Half the reason we're up here isn't just to raise money but also to educate," Stewart said. "One in five girls and one in 10 boys will be sexually exploited by the time they reach adulthood - and that's just sexual abuse, that isn't counting physical and verbal and all the other kinds."

The Lincoln High School teacher, county commissioner-elect and disc jockey sat atop the restaurant three years ago when they were raising funds to start the advocacy center.

Executive Director of the Child Advocacy Center Ellen Lynch said the center allows children involved in abuse cases to be interviewed at the facility with all departments present to reduce the trauma they feel each time they have to tell their story.

Shiawassee County Assistant Prosecutor Sara Edwards said her children will be eating McDonald's for many of their meals this weekend as she works to help raise funds.

"The Child Advocacy Center is such a key project for this community because prior to its existence there was no safe place for children or families to be interviewed," said Edwards, who is a board member of the Child Abuse Prevention Council.

Previously, children were interviewed at either the police station or the prosecutor's office library - neither being very child-friendly, said Edwards. Having the multiple departments coming together to require only one interview instead of having to go over the abuse multiple times allows them to reduce "re-victimization."

The center has interviewed more than 300 children since it opened its doors in March of 2005.

"Child abuse is rampant everywhere," said Karen VanEpps, President of the Child Abuse Prevention Council and administrator of juvenile and family courts. "Child abuse is a true community issue. We have a great community but abuse

happens here and as a community we need to say it's not acceptable."

The event is sponsored by the Child Abuse Prevention Council of Shiawassee Council, McDonald's and owners Bob and Mary VanPoppelen, The Castle and the Shiawassee-Owosso Kiwanis.

Today, the YMCA will also be joining in on the cause as they host children's activities and bring in a NASCAR truck provided by UPS. Activities will run from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and include face paintings, clowns and prizes.

Mike Ash, 911 director, said he will spend his weekend alongside Stewart, but at a lower elevation as the driver of the Bobcat that will bring community celebrities and dignitaries up to his post.

"It's just a great organization and so important he said to this community," said Ash who is on the board of the Child Abuse Prevention Council and interviewed children in the past. "I'll be here until Dan says he's going to sleep - then we take the Bobcat away so he can't leave."



Argus-Press Photo/Anthony Cepak Dan "The Man" Stewart waves to motorists as they pass by McDonalds on M-21 in Owosso Friday afternoon. Stewart is participating in a Roof Sit fundraiser for the Child Advocacy Center.

DJ taking to open air in attempt to raise money

OWOSSO

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Friday, November 17, 2006

By Linda Angelo

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OWOSSO - He'll likely get wet and won't get much sleep, but disc jockey "Dan the Man" Stewart of WJSZ-FM (92.5) plans to sit on the roof of McDonald's until \$15,000 is raised for the Child Advocacy Center.

Stewart will broadcast live three times an hour from the McDonald's on M-21 as part of the Third Annual Coins for Kids Roof Sit. The event was expected to kick off at 7 a.m. today.

"I love doing this kind of stuff," Stewart said. "I'll probably get a cold out of it, but if we can raise \$15,000 in a few days, it makes a difference in our community."

The money collected will help pay the mortgage on the W. Main Street building that houses the Child Advocacy Center, the Child Abuse Prevention Council and baby pantry office.

Last year, Stewart spent 60 hours on the roof at the event, which raised \$18,000.

He doesn't get lonely up there, though. Every hour Stewart conducts a live interview with special guests. Community leaders, law enforcement officers, judges and principals from the Owosso School District are expected to join him at this year's event.

Donations can be dropped in the Coins for Kids buckets. Change also will be collected today and Saturday at the McDonald's restaurants in Corunna, Durand and Perry.

The Child Advocacy Center opened in 2005 to provide a child-friendly, comfortable atmosphere where kids can talk about alleged abuse and neglect. Officials observe a child's interview through closed-circuit television in a separate room, eliminating the need for multiple interviews in different settings.

"Since we began, we've interviewed over 300 children," CAC Director Ellen Lynch said. "We're bringing appropriate agencies together for this child and moving them from a crisis state to a stable state."

Lynch said the Coins for Kids Roof Sit is a great way for the community to learn more about child abuse and neglect. The event is sponsored by the Child Abuse Prevention

Council of Shiawassee County, McDonald's, WJSZ and the Shiawassee-Owosso Kiwanis Club.

QUICK TAKE

Coins for Kids
Roof Sit
Donations for the
Child Advocacy
Center can be
made by calling
(989) 723-5877 or
at the following
McDonald's
locations:

601 W. Main
St., Owosso

2400 E. Main
St., Corunna

8760 E.
Lansing Road,
Durand

3077 W.
Lansing Road,
Perry

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Article published Nov 18, 2006

Helping children in family court

Children caught up in the Family Court system often call two places home: Mom's house and Dad's house.

Often when custody battles commence, those children are bounced back and forth between the two homes.

Paula Owens has seen children caught in the tug-of-war when a

custody battle spins out of control, and she says public officials rarely put the children first when decisions are made.

Owens, CEO of the nonprofit organization Paul's Center for Children's Rights in Spartanburg, says she's seen children leave the courthouse with little hope of healing.

Those cases that deal with divorce, custody disputes, sexual abuse and even adoption sometimes leave children with the short end of the stick, Owens said. In 1999, she felt the need to help remedy what she calls a "clogged system."

"I knew that some things in Family Court needed to change. I witnessed some negative divorce hearings," Owens said.

Feeling frustrated, she asked an accountant for advice on how to start her own business. "I figured the legislators would talk to a business before they talked to just a person," she said.

She would name the organization Paul's Foundation – in honor of her only grandson, who is now 11 and has navigated the Family Court system with his mother.

Owens' organization has eight board members, not including her.

The goals of her organization are to help educate and give monetary support to families who enter the Family Court system. Through education, Owens said, people will be empowered to act in the best interests of everyone involved and, most importantly, the children.

She and her board members volunteer for this cause, and no one is paid a salary, Owens said.

"I'm happy doing what I'm doing, but I'd be even happier if I were drawing a salary," she said with a laugh.

Operating from the lower level of the RE/MAX Realty building on Real Estate Way, Paul's Center runs solely on donations and grants.

Alex Hudson, the co-owner of RE/MAX Realty, donated office space -- three offices and a conference room – to the organization.

"I just thought it was a good cause, and they are working hard. They needed start-up help, and we had the space available," Hudson said. "Paula's daughter works for one of our agents and knew that we had the space available, so she contacted me. They'd like to have offices so we worked out a little something."

Owens's daughter, Amy Bradley-Raines, said she's proud of what her mother is trying to accomplish.

"She's trying really hard to help people because common people don't know who to turn to when they can't find anyone else," Bradley-Raines said.

Purpose takes shape

In 2005, the center's purpose and role began to evolve from protecting children from nasty divorce proceedings to protecting them from sex predators.

"I think things just evolved," Owens said, when explaining the organization's growth. "You start off to do one thing, but then people just started calling me."

It was one of those calls that prompted the change in the company's title and duties, Owens said.

After receiving a telephone call from a desperate parent, Owens began keeping a close eye on a case in Greenville County. The father obtained sole custody of his children, although he was a registered sex offender, Owens said.

Complicated cases like that preoccupy Owens and her time. She's dubbed herself an advocate to help bring awareness to children's rights, especially when state laws and legislation fails to keep the welfare of the state's children first.

As the organization continued to develop, Owens felt compelled to rename the foundation Paul's Center for Children's Rights.

In addition to operating the organization, Owens substitute teaches at the Spartanburg County Alternative School.

"I'm 24 hours a day, 365 days a year," Owens said. "Sometimes I get a little obsessive."

Philip Waldrop, a board member of the organization, has known Owens for nearly 15 years.

Their relationship started at the Spartanburg County 911 dispatch center in the early 1990s where they both worked as dispatchers; Waldrop was the supervisor.

The two became friends and Waldrop took on a board member position for the center when he retired. Waldrop said that Owens passion is unmatched.

"She's really dedicated to this and believes in it," he said.

Owens said she has already sketched a 10-year plan, which includes family counseling for those entering the Family Court system. Owens said if her grandson is interested, she will have him take over the organization when she retires.

But that's at least a decade down the road. Until then, Owens plans to focus on plugging judicial loopholes and speaking out against anything she deems an injustice.

She continuously refers to her company's mission statement: "...Through monitoring the court process, we will inform and educate the public concerning issues that arise in the Family Court System. We will monitor the laws of South Carolina and other states to improve these laws so they are more favorable to children."

Ever the watchdog

On Monday, Owens wasn't missing a beat at the Spartanburg County Legislative Delegation meeting. She had an overwhelming need to know why there were no state laws against sex offenders walking on school grounds.

It was only the first of many appearances she plans to make to question laws – or the lack of state laws protecting children.

On Dec. 5, Owens will be in Columbia to watch the Judicial Merit Selection Commission's public hearings – a statewide process that screens judges for vacant seats or re-election. She's already e-mailed a list of questions to the commission in hopes her questions will be answered during the hearing.

Two Spartanburg Family Court judges will be up for re-election, and Owens wants to question their judicial performance, she said.

If her questions aren't raised or answered to her satisfaction, then she'll take the next step: Alerting all of the state senators and representatives she can talk to.

"There's thousands of pieces of legislation that go in front of senators and every House member. There's no way they can read every one of those pieces of legislation," Owens said. It's her organization's job, she says, to remind lawmakers of the bills that require a second look, for the sake of the children.

Owens, who could easily be mistaken for a lobbyist, said that there is a major difference between her job and that of the congressional game players.

"We're not a lobbyist group; we're an advocate for children," Owens said. "A lobbyist always has their company's interest at heart. An advocate cares about the children and their best interests."

Jessica L. De Vault can be reached at (864) 562-7216 or jessica.devault@shj.com.

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Published: November 20. 2006 3:00AM

DETROIT FREE PRESS LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Birth parents failed, too

The foster care system failed Isaac Lethbridge. But it sickens me to hear his birth father saying, "We're just happy that slowly, justice is being done," because had his birth parents been responsible enough to handle their own child, he may not have died ("Mother loses her rights as a parent," Nov. 14). Isaac's parents should blame themselves.



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Published November 19, 2006

'Waiting children' a growing issue in adoption

ST. JOHNS - November - National Adoption Month - is a month set aside to raise awareness of adoption, particularly adoption of "waiting children."

Waiting children are those in the foster care system. Children may stay in the foster care system for days or weeks or longer. The role of foster care is care for these children while their birth parents work to resolve the problems that resulted in the child being placed in foster care. Sometimes the problems are resolved, and the family is reunited. Other times, parental rights are terminated and the child becomes available for adoption.

Waiting children adoptions are often referred to as special needs adoptions. The term special needs often is perceived as meaning children with severe problems. The term actually refers to waiting children, those who are harder to place than healthy infants.

Waiting children fall into one or more of the following categories:

- Those who have emotional, mental, learning or physical impairments;
- Those who are part of a sibling group that must be adopted together;
- Those of minority heritage; and/or
- Those who are older than five

Waiting children may have been victims of abuse or neglect. Some were born to mothers who abused drugs or alcohol, creating a dependency in the infant.

Regardless of the circumstances the children come from or the impairments they carry, they all have one need in common, according to Carolyn Delavan, senior juvenile services officer with the Clinton County Juvenile Court. They all need a home and family.

According to Lutheran Social Services of Michigan, at any given time, there are more than 18,000 children in Michigan are in foster care. Those who are not reunited with their birth families often face long periods of foster care.

According to Michigan Department of Human Services, 4,047 children became wards of the court in the state in fiscal year 2005. Many of those children are now eligible and waiting to be adopted. Some will be adopted by other family members. Some will be adopted by their foster parents. Many will wait until they are welcomed into the hearts and home of their adopted family, if that ever happens for them.

Eligible children who are not adopted often have a bleak outcome. After age 11, the chances of being adopted decrease drastically, according to state statistics. Those children are in formative

years when love and stability are crucial. On average, a foster child in the United States will be placed in three different foster homes during three years in foster care. Children who spend long periods in foster care and in multiple placements are at higher risk for developing behavior and mental health problems, as well as having problems in school.

Anyone interested in learning more about adopting a waiting child is encouraged to contact the Michigan Department of Human Services or a private adoption agency. Another valuable source of information on waiting-child adoption is the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange at www.mare.org.

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Cass County has finalized 65 adoptions

Friday, November 17, 2006 3:17 PM EST

CASSOPOLIS - Cass County, in conjunction with the State of Michigan, will hold its fourth annual Adoption Day Tuesday, Nov. 21, at 3 p.m.

The event is sponsored by the Michigan Department of Human Services, the Michigan Supreme Court and each respective Family Court.

Since the last Adoption Day, there have been more than 65 adoptions finalized in Cass County.

Michigan celebrates adoptive families and efforts to place children into adoptive homes at the fourth annual Michigan Adoption Day on Nov. 21.

Along with the special celebration on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm proclaimed November as Adoption Month in Michigan and the Michigan Supreme Court issued a resolution declaring Nov. 21 as Michigan Adoption Day.

The Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE), the Michigan Supreme Court and the Michigan Department of Human Services co-sponsor the event.

Local courts, DHS county offices and private adoption agencies from across Michigan are collaborating on events that will include finalizing adoptions and parties for adoptive families. Some counties hold informational open houses with speakers and information about the adoption process.

While DHS and state courts strive to reunite children with their birth parents, doing so is not always in the child's best interest.

Courts may terminate parental rights in cases of child abuse and neglect.

In 2006, more than 4,400 children have adoption as part of their permanency plan and many of them have special needs as the result of physical, mental or emotional impairments.

Many children who are waiting for a family are older, members of minorities or have siblings. In fiscal year 2005, 2,883 children with special needs were adopted.

Anyone interested in adopting a child may contact MARE at (800) 589-6273 or visit the Web site at www.mare.org.

Adoption:

www.michigan.gov/dhs

Michigan Adoption Day: <http://courts.michigan.gov/supremecourt/Press/MichiganAdoptionDayIndex.htm>.

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Article published Nov 19, 2006

Opening court lets people witness value of adoptions

The St. Clair County Family Court each year handles hundreds of cases involving children who are abused or neglected by their parents or others. The Michigan Department of Human Services and the court works with the parents in an effort to reunite children with their birth parents.

When, however, it becomes apparent that doing so is not in the best interest of the child after a trial on the issue, many times the birth parent's rights to parent their child are terminated. The child is then made a ward of the state.

When the birth parents lose their parental rights to children, many of these foster parents, relatives and others, step forward to provide a permanent caring and loving home for these children through adoption. Last year there were 108 children adopted in St. Clair County Family Court.

Adoption cases are confidential proceedings and are usually open only to the adopting family and those persons invited by the family to be present.

On Nov. 21, however, in recognition of National Adoption Day, St. Clair County Family Court will be participating in a celebration of this important event in the lives of these children by opening the proceedings on this day to the public.

Each of the families participating that day has agreed to waive the confidentiality of the proceedings so that the public can share in this important and happy event. It also serves as an opportunity to those who are contemplating adoption or becoming foster parents to see first hand the tremendous impact they can have on the lives of children who simply want to be loved and cared for.

If you are considering adoption or becoming a foster parent, please take the initiative to call the Michigan Department of Human Services at (810) 966-2159, visit www.michigan.gov/dhs or visit the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange Web site at www.mare.org

ELWOOD L. BROWN

Chief Probate Judge

St. Clair County Probate Court

JAMES NUNOLD

Director

St. Clair County Department of Human Services

Nov. 16

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This is a printer friendly version of an article from **The Detroit News**
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November 19, 2006

More rights and respect urged for birth mothers who place infants for adoption

David Crary / AP National Writer

NEW YORK -- Mothers deciding to place their infants for adoption deserve better counseling, more time to change their minds, and more support in trying to keep track of the children they relinquish, a leading adoption institute recommends in a sweeping new report.

The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute said its report, being issued Sunday, is the most comprehensive ever devoted to birth mothers, whom it described as "the least understood and most stigmatized participants" in the adoption process.

"Birth parents have been a population that has been neglected for so long -- just starting a dialogue that respects them as flesh-and-blood human beings is really important," said the institute's executive director, Adam Pertman.

The report focuses on U.S. mothers who voluntarily place infants for adoption -- an estimated 13,000 to 14,000 such adoptions occur annually. Most of this country's roughly 135,000 adoptions each year are from foster care; the next biggest category is overseas adoptions.

In contrast to a few decades ago, many of the voluntary U.S. adoptions are "open" -- with adoptive parents communicating with the birth mother and often allowing her regular contact with the adopted child. However, the report says a significant number of birth mothers are manipulated, pressured and deceived -- sometimes finding that they have no recourse when agreements they negotiated to visit or keep track of their children are broken.

"If you make a decision about adoption based on thinking you'll be able to see this child grow up, and suddenly the carpet is pulled from under you and the family moves away without giving you their address, you go through this traumatic loss that some women never come to terms with," the report's author, Susan Smith, said in a telephone interview.

The report recommends that all states establish legally enforceable post-adoption contact agreements; it said only 13 now have such policies covering infant adoptions.

It also recommended extending other rights to birth mothers, including pre-adoption access to pressure-free counseling about their options.

"It amazes me how many adoptions are done by attorneys, where the birth mothers have zero counseling," Smith said. "There are a lot of sharks out there, manipulating them in every way they know how, and the laws don't prevent that in most states."

Jenna Hatfield, 25, of Cambridge, Ohio, said she got little insightful counseling before she agreed three years ago to the adoption of her daughter, Ariana, by a couple from Pennsylvania.

"My agency did not tell me until a month after I signed the agreement that open adoptions are not enforceable in Pennsylvania," Hatfield said.

She said she has been fortunate in befriending the adoptive parents; they regularly bring Ariana to visit Hatfield, who is now married and has a 1-year-old son.

"Thus far it's worked very well for me -- just a couple of bumps," Hatfield said. "But unless both sides are willing to put in the legwork, there are going to be problems, and they'd need counseling to help them meet in the middle."

One problem cited in the report is a shortage of mental health professionals trained to understand the grief and loss experienced by birth mothers.

The report said birth mothers' chances of achieving peace of mind are greatest if they are able to keep in contact with the adopted children, or get continuing information about them.

"Mothers after childbirth are in a very vulnerable state," Smith said. "We need laws and practices that protect their rights and interests."

The report recommended that birth mothers be given at least a few weeks after childbirth before the adoption decision becomes irrevocable. At present, irrevocable consent for an adoption can be established within four days after birth in roughly half the states.

"In many states, you can change your mind about buying a vacuum cleaner or taking out a mortgage within a prescribed time period, but most states do not have a revocation period during which a mother can change her mind about relinquishing her child," the report said.

The report said the rights of birth fathers also deserve stronger protections, including notification of pending adoptions.

Current adoption practices, the report said, "are too often based on outdated understandings, faulty stereotypes, and misinformation from the time that secrecy pervaded the adoption world."

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Newborns need preventive care

Monday, November 20, 2006

From The Dallas Morning News:

Hospitals and doctors across the country report that newborns have been denied coverage since a federal policy that prohibits automatic Medicaid eligibility to babies took effect this year.

And it's only a matter of time before this new law results in unintended tragedy.

The American Academy of Pediatrics is sufficiently alarmed by the possibility that newborns will wind up without preventive care, immunizations and treatments essential to their first year of life that it has asked the federal government to clarify the intended purpose of the policy.

Before President Bush signed the change into law in February, babies in most states were automatically eligible for Medicaid. States had to cover children's medical expenses for one year. The new policy requires that parents also fill out an application and prove the child is a U.S. citizen. The problem? Processing birth certificates can sometimes take weeks or months.

... Two hundred babies under the age of 12 months were denied Medicaid coverage between August and October because they lacked citizenship documents, according to the Texas Health and Human Services Commission.

The new guidelines are designed to curb fraudulent abuse of Medicaid benefits, a worthy goal. But innocent children should not be left vulnerable because of possible paperwork tie-ups. ...

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Published November 19, 2006

Free Alzheimer's consultations offered to families

ST. JOHNS — The Alzheimer's Association, in conjunction with the Clinton County Department of Human Services, is offering "Answers on Alzheimer's," a free consultation program for local families affected by memory loss.

"Answers on Alzheimer's" provides an opportunity for local families and dementia care professionals to meet one-on-one with a representative from the Alzheimer's Association to discuss questions related to memory loss and caregiving concerns. Meetings will be held Dec. 5 from noon to 5 p.m. at the Clinton County Department of Human Services, 201 W. Railroad St., St. Johns. One-hour appointments are scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis. All meetings are free and confidential.

For more information, contact the Alzheimer's Association, Michigan Great Lakes Chapter at (800) 272-3900 or (517) 364-7590. To schedule an appointment, call (989) 224-5537.

— *From the Alzheimer's Association.*

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Article published Nov 19, 2006

GUEST COLUMNIST

Helping those who are less fortunate than ourselves

Have you ever wondered how you can make a difference in the lives of many Battle Creek residents, but not known where to start? The place to start changing lives is the Haven of Rest Ministries.

The Haven of Rest Ministries is a nonprofit, faith-based human services organization that provides emergency shelter, food and life-skills training to homeless individuals. The Haven has been providing life-changing services to the Battle Creek community for the past 50 years.

Since The Haven's first day of operation in 1956, The Haven has been committed to transforming the lives of the homeless in Battle Creek through providing innovative and exceptional service. The Haven has continually adapted services to address the pressing issues of homelessness. Over time, The Haven has expanded services to include several different divisions:

- **Adult Foster Care:** The Haven provides licensed adult foster care for 15 mentally challenged men. Clients are offered access to psychological counseling, assistance with medication and therapeutic recreational opportunities.
- **Calhoun County Jail Ministry:** The Haven provides services to incarcerated individuals through its program operated directly in the Calhoun County Jail. This program hosts support sessions and Bible studies for incarcerated individuals and identifies those requiring emergency shelter upon release.
- **Gain Access Program:** This program is designed to help homeless children gain access to life skills that they may not have been consistently exposed to. While The Haven's other programs work directly with the adults to teach them life skills, GAP works directly with the children, allowing them to gain access to life-skills training as well.
- **Inasmuch House:** The Haven provides temporary shelter (30-60 days), food and life-skills training for women and children. Each resident receives training on subjects including budgeting, landlord/tenant relations, job readiness and much more.
- **Life Recovery Program:** The Haven has added a pioneering, comprehensive long-term transitional housing program for single men that focuses on breaking the depressing cycle of substance dependency and homelessness.
- **Men's shelter and life-skills instructor:** Emergency food and shelter are provided to men on a temporary basis (30-60 days). The life-skills instructor works with each individual by offering case management to all men in the shelter, assisting with transitions to and from the shelter.
- **Women In New (WIN) Life Program:** This program is a six-month to two-year transitional housing program where families receive long-term life-skills training to break the cycle of poverty and homelessness.

You can assist The Haven in making a difference in the lives of your fellow community members by sharing your resources whether they are time, talent or finances. You can make donations of food, cleaning and office supplies. Also, The Haven participates in the H.O.P.E. Day program, giving items such as food, coats and sleeping bags to those living on the streets. This program can always use donations for the giveaway. Lastly, the Haven can utilize community advocates and volunteers who assist The Haven with fundraising and advocacy. Donations go for a worthwhile cause and can revolutionize hundreds of people's lives. You can start your support today, by mail (with the envelope enclosed in today's newspaper) or drop off at 11 Green St., Battle Creek, MI 49014.

Chris Sizemore is fund development specialist for The Haven of Rest.

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The Daily Telegram

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MONDAY NOVEMBER 20, 2006 Last modified: *Saturday, November 18, 2006 10:18 PM EST*

Dell, Share the Warmth honored for work with homeless

The recognitions were made during a luncheon Friday at Siena Heights University.

By [David Panian](#)

Daily Telegram Staff Writer

ADRIAN — Five individuals and two groups were honored Friday for their work in helping the homeless in Lenawee and Monroe counties.

Sister Norma Dell, an Adrian Dominican nun who was the first director of the Lenawee Emergency and Affordable Housing Corp. (LEAHC), was honored with the naming of the Lenawee Continuum of Care's "Courage to Care" award in her honor. The continuum, a group of agencies that works with the homeless and those close to being homeless, then presented the first award to the Share the Warmth group.

Share the Warmth has organized wintertime, emergency homeless shelters at St. John's School in Adrian for the past two winters. The shelter will open again in December with extended hours at the Salvation Army's West Church Street location.

The recognitions were made during a luncheon Friday at Siena Heights University.

Jae Guetschow of the Lenawee County office of the state's department of human services said Dell was ahead of the game in addressing homelessness.

"When the rest of us couldn't spell continuum, she had the vision to start the first continuum of care," he said. "Now you can't even get grant funding without a continuum of care."

Dell returned to Adrian after working for 12 years in Kentucky in an area with 60 percent unemployment creating a variety of social services. As director of LEAHC, she built a small staff, developed the family emergency housing unit on Toledo street and built the transitional housing program's houses on Siena Heights Drive, Guetschow said.

Sister Elizabeth Clare Schindler was a LEAHC board member when Dell became director. "We were thrilled," she said after the luncheon. "She was just perfect for LEAHC."

Guetschow also said that Dell is a modest person and wouldn't want this award named for her if it wasn't going to also honor others, and she did thank those in attendance for helping the homeless.

"I simply want to recognize all of you, as the caring people who address the needs of people in distress, and your agency staff, boards and volunteers, and the financial donors, and the in-kind donors, and the city, county, state and national officials who work together to care, and many times that takes extraordinary courage," Dell said.

Dell then presented the award to Share the Warmth, calling the group "kind of an unlikely gathering of individuals and various church groups who brought their Christianity and caring together in a common project."

“With no fuss, no complaining, no money, they just made sure that homeless people had a safe and warm place to sleep during the coldest winter nights.”

Sister Pat Schnapp, a member of the Sisters of Mercy congregation based in Cincinnati, accepted the award for Share the Warmth, informing the audience about the shelter’s plans at the Salvation Army. She said there were 39 volunteers at the orientation meeting Thursday.

“It’s very satisfying to see the number of people willing to help,” she said.

Recognized for their work with the homeless in Monroe County were the God Works Family Soup Kitchen and Joe Grifka, director of the Fairview Transitional Shelter and Care.

During a conference on homeless education before the lunch, Adrian Public School homeless education liaison Beth McCullough presented two Hope Awards, to Adrian High School counselor Janet Frank for her work in helping homeless students graduate and go to college and to Cara French, a parent and volunteer at Michener Elementary School who started a Birthday Club to provide birthday presents to homeless students.

McCullough said French was moved to help such students after overhearing a mother in Michener’s office say her family had lost its home. Her son was wearing flip-flops, and French wanted to buy him shoes.

“That little boy really weighed heavy on my heart,” French said. “I overheard the mother say, ‘I lost my home,’ and that really bothered me.”

That grew into the Birthday Club, a phone list of volunteers who offer to buy presents for homeless children.

The luncheon was also a chance for the Lenawee Continuum of Care to discuss its 10-year plan to end homelessness. State Rep. Dudley Spade, D-Tipton, said Michigan is the only state in the nation that has such plans that cover every county.

-- CLOSE WINDOW--



THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Real estate investors help homeless agency

Women in nonprofit The Nesting Place facing eviction from current living quarters

Saturday, November 18, 2006

BY SUSAN L. OPPAT

News Staff Reporter

Barbara Watson, a 61-year-old Harvard MBA, will tell you she went "from Harvard to homeless" after her husband died in 2001. On Friday, she faced the possibility that The Nesting Place, a fledgling agency that's put a roof over her head for the past 11 months, was itself about to be homeless - until a pair of real estate investors came to the rescue.

With "only a little begging," said Nesting Place founder Michelle Harney, real estate investors David and Sean Dykhoush agreed to a plan that will put the agency in a smaller home - and on a path to buy the place at less than market price.

The Nesting Place is "exactly what we were looking for in terms of tenants," David Dykhoush said Friday. Father and son own Stamford LLC, a property investment firm in Ann Arbor, and Sean Dykhoush owns the real estate firm ClickonAnnArbor.com.

David Dykhoush said they invest in real estate - buying wrecked houses, putting them right, using local people who need work and then renting them out - "for the right reasons." After the deal was struck Friday, he said: "One of the most 'right reasons' is to help people in unfortunate circumstances."

Harney and the tenants of The Nesting Place were in that unfortunate place this week, about to be evicted from the former fraternity house they had worked to clean up before moving in just over a year ago. Harney had put \$300 down on a \$2,800 deposit for a smaller house, which the Dykhoushs own in Pittsfield Township and that will rent for \$1,400 a month. Harney didn't have the other \$2,500.

On Friday, the Dykhoushs agreed to settle for the \$300 as a deposit.

"You have to do this because the government we all thought would help, would provide a safety net, isn't always there," David Dykhoush said. "In our particular line of work, we can help in our small way."

Harney said there is no "small way" about what the men are doing for The Nesting Place.

She started the agency to house women 45 and older who once were self-sufficient, but find themselves homeless or on the verge of it. She is seeking official IRS tax-exempt standing, but without that status has been unable to acquire public grants. The group has been operating on a wish and a prayer and little else, she said.

The agency started by renting the 8,000-square-foot, 23-bedroom fraternity house from Alpha Tau Omega. The fraternity's national office had closed the house because members had damaged it so badly. Because The Nesting Place intended to rent to as many as 16 women at a time, the \$425 individual room and board charge should have covered the fraternity's \$4,500 monthly costs, the only payment the fraternity sought.

The agency never reached that capacity for any length of time, Harney said, and hasn't had enough income to pay more than \$2,000 a month. For the past two months, The Nesting Place hasn't paid any rent at all, she said. That doesn't address the \$3,000 winter heating and power bills, the water bill, nor the \$1,500 in repairs and other various debts that currently stand at about \$5,000.

Harney said the fraternity has forgiven all rents due, but delivered the eviction notice Thursday. The Nesting Place must be out by Tuesday.

ATO officials were unavailable for comment Friday.

"They have been kind and generous to a fault," Harney said of fraternity officials. "But they're in a difficult financial position of their own. They've done everything they could to accommodate us."

Harney said the women were in a Catch-22. They couldn't get help from shelters or other agencies until they had been assisted or refused by the state Department of Human Services. But DHS, she said, wouldn't help until they had an eviction notice. Harney now said she plans to return to DHS on Monday.

All of the women at The Nesting Place have college degrees, Harney said, but they might be too old to get well-paying jobs and too young for Social Security. They sometimes are called "shadow women," because they fall into a demographic of educated, middle-aged and unemployed.

By offering these women affordable living space, The Nesting Place can be lifesaving.

"It's comfortable and safe living here," Watson said. "I really enjoy the staff; they are my friends, and most tenants get along well."

Watson said she couldn't bear living alone in California after her husband died. "I pretty much fell apart," she said. She quit her job as vice president of marketing for a graphics firm in Los Angeles, where her largest client was Universal Studios, and moved to Grosse Ile to be near family. She has no children, but two siblings and her father in the area.

She eventually landed for three months in a homeless shelter in Ann Arbor, where she heard about The Nesting Place. She moved there in January.

A recovering alcoholic, Watson had some "slips" after her husband died but has been sober for two years. She's working now as an aide at the Turner Senior Center and loves the work, although it pays little more than minimum wage. She thinks going on Social Security next month when she turns 62 will help.

She said the communal living and cooking at The Nesting Place work for her. Once she starts getting Social Security, she hopes to continue to polish her office and graphics skills, and perhaps start a small firm. Those plans hinge on having a place to live.

"Right now," she said, "all I want to do is hang in there."

For more information on The Nesting Place, call 734-761-2620; donations, which are not currently tax-deductible, may be mailed to The Nesting Place, P.O. Box 3397, Ann Arbor, 48106-3397.

Susan Oppat can be reached at soppat@annarbornews.com or at 734-482-1166.

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SHARING THE BOUNTY: Groups give help for the holidays

They'll feed families in metro area

BY STAN DONALDSON
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

November 20, 2006

As Matthew Allen waited for fellow members of his Leadership Oakland group to pack into a conference room at Lighthouse of Oakland County in Pontiac, he sifted his fork through ramen noodles and water in a bowl -- his lunch of choice.

Lora Webberman, a DaimlerChrysler employee from Berkley, munched on half of a peanut butter and banana sandwich, purchased with the few cents rationed to each participant.

Allen, a Detroit attorney, and Webberman are two of the 50 members of this year's Leadership Oakland class, which learned about hunger and other health and human service issues two weeks ago in Oakland County.

"This is sad, and it is unbelievable to see how some people have to live," Webberman said.

For a few hours, Allen and Webberman got a closer look at poverty -- including figuring out how to buy lunch with just 86 cents -- but many metro Detroiters face that plight daily. And, as Thanksgiving approaches, several area agencies are gearing up to serve those in need.

On Wednesday in Detroit, the Detroit Area Agency on Aging, which provides Meals on Wheels in the city, will begin its yearly fund-raiser to help feed more than 5,000 sick or shut-in seniors on Thanksgiving and Christmas, said Paul Bridgewater, the agency's executive director.

"I think the biggest issue is that the seniors are not seen in the public and they are forgotten about on the holidays," Bridgewater said Thursday.

Greater Grace Temple, on Detroit's west side, plans to distribute nearly 500 turkeys to families in need of assistance Tuesday, starting at 2 p.m.

In Roseville, Solid Ground Inc. helped more than 400 people through its holiday assistance program last year and expects to help even more this week.

Dee McCardle, executive director of the group, which helps families get back on their feet, said only about 47 people signed up for help this year, but the agency expects more to sign up this week.

In Oakland County, several nonprofits have organized special collection drives to help families.

Members of Lighthouse of Oakland County Inc. collected food at All Saints Episcopal Church in Pontiac last week to help more than 4,000 people through its Thanksgiving Adopt-a-Family Program.

Maureen McWalters, a community relations officer with Lighthouse, said about 40 volunteers helped to sort boxes of food that will be given to families this week.

Also in Pontiac this week, volunteers with the Baldwin Center will hand out food and give two weeks' worth of groceries to 300 families who signed up for its Thanksgiving assistance program.

Cara Rayner, the center's executive director, said most of the food is collected from churches and families. She said that with Michigan's struggling economy, she has seen instances in which even former volunteers have come to the organization for help.



Volunteers sort food that will help more than 4,000 people this week after a collection at All Saints Episcopal Church in Pontiac. "A lot of folks just need a wake-up call to see just how hard it is out here," said Patricia Stephens of Pontiac, who has both given and received help. (Photos by SUSAN TUSA/Detroit Free Press)

Where to give help and find help

Here are a few organizations that could use help, and a few where people can seek help during the holiday season:

• **The Detroit Area Agency on Aging** is seeking volunteers to help with its Meals on Wheels program for seniors on Thanksgiving and Christmas. For information, call 313-446-4444.

• **The Baldwin Center in Pontiac** will be collecting food and new toys for Christmas. The center is at 212 Baldwin Ave. For information, call 248-332-6101, or go to www.baldwincenter.org.

• **Solid Ground Inc. in Roseville** is accepting

"I don't think a lot of people understand that a lot of the folks who come here have jobs -- they just don't have high-paying jobs -- and providing a Thanksgiving meal is a challenge," Rayner said Tuesday.

Patricia Stephens has been on both sides of the fence when it comes to going to organizations for help during rough times.

The 43-year-old Pontiac resident, who works at the Baldwin Center, said she thinks programs like the one Leadership Oakland put together last week help people see what it's like to need a helping hand. She said she turned to the program when raising her four children became too hard on her financially.

"A lot of folks just need a wake-up call to see just how hard it is out here for others," Stephens said. "This place was a big help, and I don't know where I would have turned to."

Contact **STAN DONALDSON** at 248-351-3691 or sdonaldson@freepress.com.

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canned goods and nonperishable foods to donate to Macomb County families for Thanksgiving and Christmas. For information, call 586-772-3604, or go to www.solidgroundinc.org.

• **Greater Grace Temple and other agencies** will cosponsor a turkey giveaway from 2 to 5 p.m. Tuesday at BT Auto, 21221 W. Seven Mile in Detroit. For information, call 313-543-6000 or visit www.greatergrace.org.



THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

VOLUNTEERS

Friday, November 17, 2006

This listing of volunteer opportunities is compiled by the Livingston County United Way.

INTAKE PROCESS

The Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency needs volunteers to assist on a monthly basis with the intake process for food distribution at the agency's food distribution center in Howell. Details: 517-546-8500 or e-mail bjm@olhsa.org.

FANTASY OF TREES

The Women's Resource Center needs volunteers for the Fantasy of Trees to greet guests as they stroll through the display at The Opera House in downtown Howell. Details: 517-294-4456.

CAMPGROUND REPAIR

Camp Fire USA is looking for help with repairing and preparing Camp Wathana for the upcoming camp season. Details: 800-860-5840 or e-mail campfireusa@wathana.org.

COMMITTEE SUPPORT

The Opera House in Howell needs volunteers to sit on a variety of committees. Details: 517-540-0065 or e-mail lacoh@sbcglobal.net.

TRANSPORT SENIORS

Livingston County Catholic Social Services needs volunteers to transport seniors to medical and other appointments. Details: 517-545-5944, or e-mail lcivcp@yahoo.com.

GINGERBREAD HOUSE CONTEST

Volunteers are needed to bake, sew, or donate gingerbread themed items for St. George Ministries and help at the storefront on the week of Nov. 19-25. Details: 810-229-6661, ext. 106 or e-mail to specialmin@sbcglobal.net.

SHOPPING FOR CHRISTMAS

Operation Christmas in Gregory needs volunteers to shop, box gifts and groceries. Help is also needed to distribute gifts and groceries to families Dec. 22-23. Details: 517-851-9294.

TAKE APPLICATIONS

The Salvation Army in Howell is looking for a volunteer to take applications for families who are applying for assistance during the Thanksgiving and Christmas seasons. Details: 517-546-4750, or e-mail shelia_payton@usc.salvationarmy.org.

RESPIRE CARE

St. Joseph Mercy Livingston Hospice needs volunteers to sit with patients. Details: 517-540-9129 or e-mail

kswiley@trinity-health.org.

MENTORS FOR

YOUNG ADULTS

The Department of Human Services for Livingston County is looking for mentors for young adults in transition to independent living.

Details: (517) 548-0288 or e-mail shusterj@michigan.gov.

Volunteer Livingston, a program of the Livingston County United Way, promotes the need for volunteers in the Livingston County area.

For a complete list of current volunteer postings, visit the Web site www.lcunitedway.org. Please submit your organization's volunteer needs to donr@chartermi.net.

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Program to assist on energy expenses

<FEFF>City plan will help make homes more energy

Sunday, November 19, 2006

BY TRACY DAVIS

News Staff Reporter

Early next year, Ann Arbor homeowners within certain income guidelines will be able to take advantage of financial assistance to lower their utility bills.

The city has started a program to assist lower-income homeowners with making their houses more energy-efficient, as a way to stabilize what's turning into a big expense for many homeowners.

The money can be used for energy-efficient appliances, lighting, windows, doors, heating and cooling systems; and for air-sealing, insulation and water-saving devices.

The money comes in the form of a low-interest loan that can be deferred until the house is sold or transferred. A maximum of \$15,000 per house will be available for single-family homes, with up to \$7,500 per unit for rental units in an owner-occupied house.

It will be available to city homeowners who earn below 80 percent of the median income, which for a family of three is \$53,650 annually.

The program complements the county's weatherization program, which is available to homeowners with incomes below 30 percent of the median income, or \$22,350.

The latest program was inspired by a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development study, which identified utility costs as a big financial threat to low- and moderate-income families who are hardest hit by rising utility costs on already stretched incomes.

The idea stemmed partly from the city's goal to provide affordable housing. That housing needs to remain low-cost over time, said housing program coordinator Jennifer Hall.

"Energy efficiency is a huge part of that," she said. "Just because you build a house up front, it doesn't make it affordable if you're paying \$200 a month in utilities."

It's a timely project. Demands for help with utility bills have been on the rise, because of the depressed Michigan economy and rising energy costs, according to the city and local social services agency officials.

Gary Bell, executive director of SOS Community Services, expects the number of people looking for assistance with utility costs will continue to rise. During the agency's last fiscal year, April 2005 to March 2006, they provided direct utility assistance to 66 families. This year, they're on track to provide for more than 90 families, he said.

"And that is presuming nothing changes," he said.

Friends In Deed deals mostly with renters. Rising utility bills are taking a bigger slice of income for many families they help.

"It's a fairly constant problem from year to year, said director Helena Prince. "It's worse with the cost of utility bills going up, but it's always been a problem."

The pilot program is funded with \$100,000 from this year's HUD block grant funds, which were \$1.2 million,

Hall said.

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This is a printer friendly version of an article from **The Detroit News**
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November 20, 2006

Teen fighting to find real dad

Lawyer for Fraser boy who sued mom to reveal biological father takes case to appeals court.

Christina Stolarz / The Detroit News

MOUNT CLEMENS -- The Fraser teen who's suing his mother to force her to reveal the identity of his biological father isn't giving up, despite a ruling by a Macomb County judge that said the law doesn't provide him the right to do so.

The teen's lawyer has filed an appeal with the Michigan Court of Appeals, arguing that the precedent cited by Judge Mark Switalski was set before sophisticated DNA testing was available.

In this case, DNA testing will allow the teen, identified as "Minor J" in court filings, to get his biological father's medical history to determine his predispositions to illnesses like heart disease and diabetes, Birmingham attorney Henry Baskin said.

Baskin points out that even donor and adoption agencies require a medical history of both parents in an effort to ensure a healthy lifestyle for the child.

"It doesn't make sense when I have compelling, indisputable evidence that can be given to the court," Baskin said. But, "they won't let me get it. It's so incredibly wrong.

"The court has made him half a child."

In April, a lawsuit was filed on behalf of Minor J that said DNA tests taken in 2004 by the teen's mother and the man he thought was his biological father -- "Mr. J" in court filings -- proved that the man was not his biological father.

The boy's mother -- "Diane J" in court filings -- and Mr. J divorced in 1995 after 13 years of marriage. Minor J was born in 1989. The pair shared custody of Minor J and the boy now lives full time in Fraser with Mr. J, who supports the lawsuit.

According to Michigan law, the husband at the time of conception and birth is deemed to be the legal father in Michigan.

And because Minor J is considered a "legitimate" child, he "has no standing to bring an action for entry of an order of filiation to name another man his father," Switalski wrote in his ruling.

"In this case, after over 15 years as the legal father, the Court would not entertain the notion that, even if the DNA evidence were true and accurate, Mr. J. would be considered anything other than the natural father."

Eastpointe attorney Alicia Putman, who is representing Diane J, said Switalski's ruling was "exactly what he should have done."

She argued in Macomb County Circuit Court the case is a paternity issue.

"It is important to know your medical background but there are other things that are just as important," Putman said. "He's a healthy kid. He has two great parents. It would be unfortunate to take that away from him."

Putman said Diane J, of Fraser, declined to be interviewed by The Detroit News.

Baskin said he will not give up on this case -- even if it takes him to the U.S. Supreme Court -- because Minor J has the right to know his genetic history. Without the medical background, he said, Minor J also won't be able to properly fill out life insurance forms.

A court document filed by Baskin on Nov. 3 cites the American Medical Association and the U.S. Surgeon General's recommendation that people obtain their complete medical backgrounds.

Baskin hopes the judge will order the woman to disclose the biological father. He then would seek a court order forcing that person to undergo a paternity test.

"Where is this kid going to find out if he's free of heart disease?" Baskin said. "It's not about inheritance or getting even. I don't want the name (of the biological father), I want the information.

"That's what's important."

You can reach Christina Stolarz at (586) 468-0343 or cstolarz@detnews.com.

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Walberg won't rule out Coons for staff

Friday, November 17, 2006

By Susan J. Demas

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U.S. Rep.-elect Tim Walberg is working in Washington this week to hire a 10-person staff, but he refused to rule out employing a former official who pleaded guilty to domestic violence during his campaign.

Daniel A. Coons, 30, of Eaton Rapids could face up to two years in prison for third-degree child abuse, depending on a District Court judge's ruling Dec. 7.

This week, an Eaton County prosecutor asked the judge to throw out the Sept. 18 plea deal for domestic violence, a lesser misdemeanor, because it was based on "inaccurate information."

"I am not going to conjecture on hiring anyone," Walberg said in a telephone interview Thursday. "As far as we're concerned, this is not a political thing; it's an issue for the courts. We're going to do the best for the district we represent."

Coons admitted hitting his 9-year-old foster child in the face Aug. 27, a police report shows. Walberg said he knew of the incident around Sept. 12. Coons resigned as volunteer coordinator Oct. 25 after the Citizen Patriot reported his guilty plea.

A hearing is scheduled for Tuesday in Eaton County Probate Court.

Walberg, R-Tipton, said this week he has been busy meeting with the 13-member Republican freshman committee, talking with GOP leadership and undergoing ethics training.

Walberg said he was reunited Monday at the White House with first lady Laura Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney, who both did campaign events for him in Michigan. Walberg also spoke with President Bush and outgoing Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert.

"It has been an amazing thing," Walberg said.

The congressman-elect also has been sifting through Washington resumé's. Last week, campaign manager Joe Wicks was named chief of staff.

State Rep. Rick Baxter, R-Concord, has had initial talks with Walberg and Wicks, but no position has been offered.

The congressman-elect said he could employ up 22 staffers -- 18 full-time -- but he is looking to start with 10 initially.

Staffers likely will be evenly split between Washington and the 7th District , Walberg said. He wants to establish offices in Jackson, Battle Creek and Delta Township.

Published November 19, 2006

Eaton County Great Start awarded \$120 K

CHARLOTTE — The Eaton County Great Start Collaborative accepted a \$120,000 grant from the Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) to strengthen early childhood development and care in Eaton County.

ECIC Chief Executive Officer Judy Samelson and Department of Human Services Director Marianne Udow presented a ceremonial check to Al Widner, Eaton Intermediate School District Superintendent.

The grant is part of a \$3.15 million award to 21 Great Start Collaboratives across Michigan that coordinate community resources and supports to help children from birth to age five and their families. A total of 70 percent of Michigan's poor and minority children now live in a county where a Great Start Collaborative is being convened.

The Early Childhood Investment Corporation, announced in Governor Jennifer Granholm's 2005 State of the State address, provides grants from a mix of public and private funding sources. Grand funding was made possible in August when the Michigan legislature approved a \$1 million appropriation for early childhood collaboratives across the state. This appropriation triggered matching funds from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Fourteen other state collaboratives were funded earlier this year by the Department of Human Services.

"These grants will help bring together the public and private sectors including government, business, civic, faith, education and community groups to develop a long-standing, sustained focus on early learning and childhood development," Samelson said. "We're grateful for the support of our partners who recognize the importance of investing in early childhood programs."

Intermediate school districts will act as fiduciaries for the grants. In addition to Eaton Intermediate School District, 21 other intermediate school districts and regional educational service areas around the state also were awarded funding for planning and/or implementation of Great State Collaboratives.

"Children who participate in high-quality early childhood development programs are better prepared to enter elementary school, are more likely to pursue secondary education and to have lower dropout rates and higher high school graduation rates," said Udow. "By improving the skills of a large fraction of the workforce, these programs for poor children will reduce poverty and strengthen the state's ability to compete in the global market."

ECIC is a unique public, nonprofit corporation created to invest in Michigan's youngest citizens. By educating, motivating and involving Michigan citizens in efforts to build and promote a system of supports for young children and their families, all Michigan children can make a Great Start!

For more information, visit www.ecic4kids.org.

— *From Early Childhood Investment Corporation.*



THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

U-M enrolling fewer poor kids

Study gives university an 'F' for accessibility

Monday, November 20, 2006

BY DAVE GERSHMAN

News Staff Reporter

The University of Michigan is becoming less accessible to students from low-income families, according to a new report from The Education Trust, a national organization dedicated to closing the achievement gap that separates low-income and minority students from other students.

The nonpartisan foundation released a study today that graded the nation's top 50 public universities on their enrollment of underrepresented minority and low-income students.

In its report card, the foundation gave U-M an "F" for access to low-income students. Twenty-five other schools also were given a failing grade. Seven received an "A," including the University of California-Berkeley.

The Education Trust looked at the percentage of students who received a Pell Grant, the federal school aid for low-income students. In 2004, the average family income for all Pell Grant recipients was \$19,299.

At U-M, 13.5 percent of students in 2004 received a Pell Grant, down from 28 percent in 1992, according to the study. Meanwhile, 33.9 percent of all students going to a college or university in Michigan received a Pell Grant in 2004, up from 30.6 percent in 1992.

U-M did much better on access to minority students, receiving a "B" on the foundation's report card, while 27 schools received an "F." The foundation considered the percentage of black, Latino and Native American freshmen at U-M in 2004 and compared it to the percentage of those students among the 2004 high school graduates in Michigan.

Julie Peterson, a U-M spokeswoman, said the university is committed to meeting the financial needs of in-state undergraduates. It has rolled out two new financial aid programs aimed specifically at low-income students in the past three years. U-M also is raising more money in need-based aid in its massive capital campaign.

But students' academic achievement in high school, she said, is highly correlated with family income levels, and competition for a slot at U-M has become stiffer.

"Our state must focus its attention on making sure all students, regardless of means, are supported in attaining a strong high school education that prepares them for college," she said.

Peterson said the perception of the cost of attending U-M is also a factor.

"Prospective students and their families consistently overestimate the cost of attending college, and underestimate the amount of financial aid that is available," she said. "We still have a lot of work to do to assure Michigan's low-income families that a U-M education is well within their reach."

In general, the foundation's report was highly critical of the flagship schools for serving fewer minority and low-income students than in the past. The authors said the schools are enrolling classes of students that don't reflect the populations of the states they were created to serve.

The authors blame the schools for boosting their college rankings by becoming more selective, and for not devoting more money to need-based financial aid.

"At a time when more and more low-income and minority students are preparing for college, it is disturbing that many of our most prestigious colleges and universities are turning away from them," Kati Haycock, one of the authors of the report, said in a statement.

The Education Trust, based in Washington, D.C., works for the high academic achievement of students at all levels, pre-kindergarten through college, focusing on closing the achievement gaps. Funding for the organization comes from numerous national foundations including the Carnegie Corp. of New York and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Reporter Dave Gershman can be reached at 734-994-6818 or dgershman@annarbornews.com.

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Michigan Report

November 17, 2006

GONGWER CENTURY: COURT REJECTS ATTEMPT TO SAVE G.A.

Michigan once was known as having some of the nation's most generous benefits for welfare recipients, but in 1991, one element of the system was officially dissolved when the state Supreme Court rejected attempts by advocates to save the general assistance benefits for able-bodied single adults without children.

Only a handful of other states were still providing such cash assistance at that time and Governor John Engler had summarily ended the program effective September 30. A successor program did provide benefits for those who demonstrated they were disabled.

But for about 80,000 individuals, the court's opinion covered in the [Friday, November 22, 1991](#) report ended attempts to keep the assistance going. The court let stand the Court of Appeals decision on the issue, which reversed Ingham Circuit Judge James Giddings order to reinstate benefits retroactive to October 1.

Susan McParland, attorney for Michigan Legal Services which brought the lawsuit on behalf of recipients, said the new program for the disabled was not working and was disappointed the court did not resolve that part of the case.

Engler spokesperson John Truscott, who said the court resolved all legal issues regarding the able-bodied, said any issues regarding an alleged backlog of disability cases could be handled by program managers.